



## *Embassy of the United States of America*

Public Affairs Office

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **U.S Ambassador Launches Fund to Fight HIV Infection and Improve Maternal & Child Health Care**

Ambassador Michael S. Owen today signed two grant agreements launching projects that will help to combat HIV infection in Sierra Leone, reduce the rate of infant mortality, and improve the overall quality of health care for mothers and children. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will fund the grants through its West African Ambassadors' Fund (WAAF). These grants will provide USD 100,000 to support education and training programs that will encourage attitudinal change and the adoption of improved health practices at the community level.

The two local grantee organizations are the Agency for Community Empowerment, Participation, and Transformation (ACEPT) and the Medical Research Center (MRC). ACEPT will focus its efforts in Pujehun District and concentrate on educating the public to adopt safe-sex practices, better understand the symptoms and long-term effects of sexually-transmitted illnesses, and deal humanely with community members who are living with HIV. MRC will work with Public Health Units in Bo and Bombali Districts to provide training and community outreach to pregnant and lactating women and their young children.

Ambassador Owen noted the importance of education in these endeavors, stating that "... people only become 'empowered' when they can think for themselves and make healthy choices based on their own understanding and motivation." On behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone, Dr. Samuel A. S. Kargbo, Director of the Reproductive and Child Health Program in the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, also stressed the importance of community-level solutions to the health issues facing rural populations.

The West Africa Ambassadors' Fund (WAAF) is part of USAID's Action for West Africa Region II (AWARE II) project. This three year project (2009-2012) provides an innovative, comprehensive approach to identify and expand best practices in family planning/reproductive health, maternal, newborn, and child health, and combating HIV/AIDS in 21 countries in West Africa. For more information, please visit the website [www.aware2.org](http://www.aware2.org).